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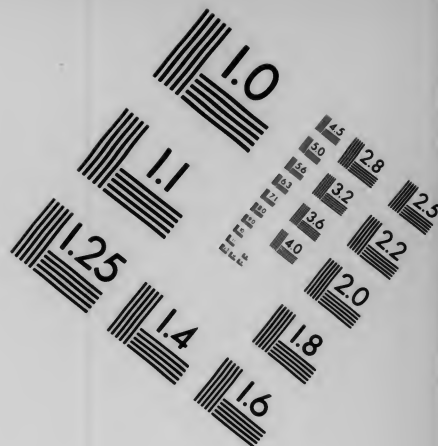
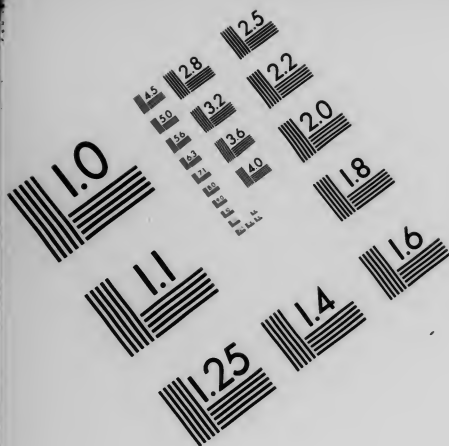
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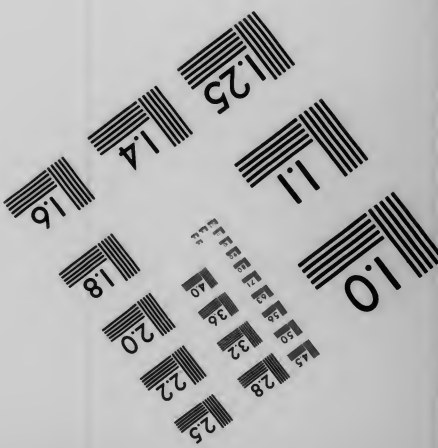
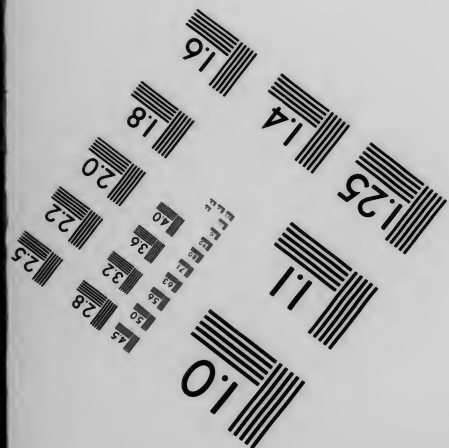
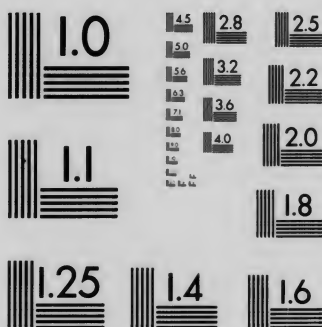
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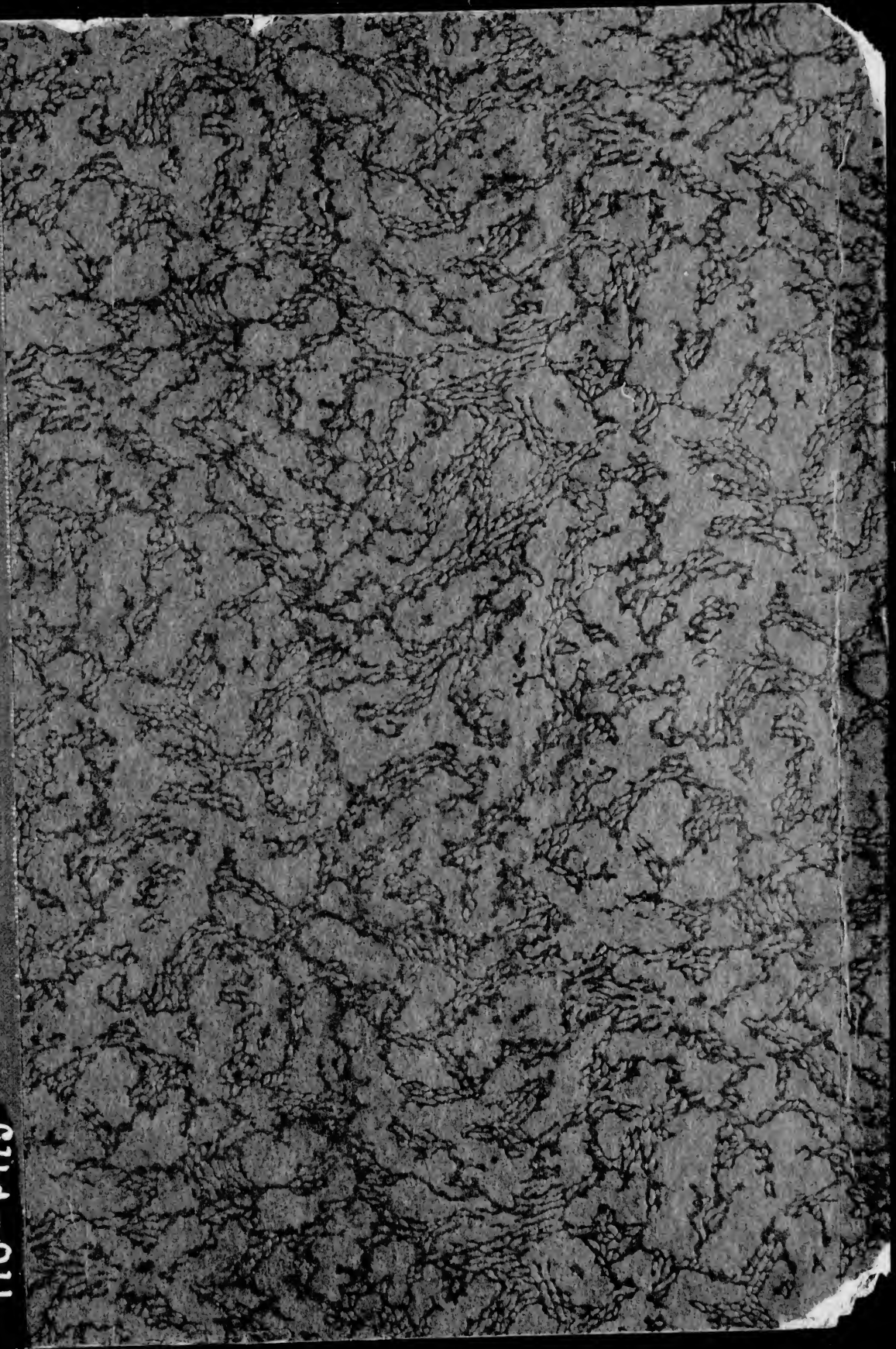


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A DISCOURSE ON ETHICS

A DISCOURSE ON ETHICS
OF THE SCHOOL OF PALEY

BY WILLIAM SMITH ESQ

BARRISTER AT LAW



LONDON
WILLIAM PICKERING

1839

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P R E F A C E.

PALEY in his chapter headed "*The moral sense,*" after balancing some of the arguments for and against what is there called a moral instinct, concludes with these words, "*This celebrated question becomes in our system a question of pure curiosity; and as such, we dismiss it to the determination of those who are more inquisitive than we are concerned to be about the natural history and constitution of the human species.*" This is a somewhat hasty expression; for although Paley proceeds, in consistency with his system of Christian ethics, to define virtue, or the best conduct, as "*the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness,*"—although he obtains in the command of God, and in the canon of Scripture, a motive, and a rule, paramount to all others, be they of what nature they may—yet both in his silence, and as I think, a prudent silence, on any moral neces-

sity operating on the mind of the *Eternal* to the issuing of his command, and in the appeal he makes, single and unhesitating, to the test of general expediency whenever the rule of Scripture is to be explained or supplied—it is plain that he does in fact adopt one side of that celebrated question, which he here leaves to the hands of mere curiosity. Every reader of Paley must feel that a moral distinction not ultimately founded on the good and evil consequences of conduct—a pure absolute right and wrong—would be an embarrassing intrusion into his system. To this theoretical point, in the hope of adding something to its elucidation, the present essay is directed and confined; and as the view here taken of human conduct is strictly ethical, it follows that a part of the subject, which to Paley and to all Christian moralists, must be of very subordinate importance, is here unavoidably made to predominate.

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A DISCOURSE ON ETHICS.

INTRODUCTION.

I PROPOSE in the following discourse to place before the reader a succinct, explanatory, and defensive statement of that ethical theory, which, while it asserts the universality and extreme importance of the moral sentiment, denies to it that character of a mental intuition by some writers so earnestly contended for ; and, submitting the sentiment to analysis, traces its origin to social influences, to the control which in every community man exerts over man. Right and Wrong, according to this theory, are the beneficial and injurious of human conduct, with the added association of that approval and disapproval of mankind which necessarily flow from benefit and injury. Whatever there is besides in the conscience, is religion, not morality.

If this doctrine be true, a brief, perspicuous exposition of it cannot be superfluous ; for trite and almost self-evident as to some minds it may appear, it is far from being generally received, and it lies,

moreover, under certain vague, unfounded, and grievous imputations. To mention only a few names, and without travelling into the literature of foreign countries, it is observable that those who have filled the chairs of moral philosophy in the Scotch Universities—men worthy on all accounts of the highest respect—such men as Reid, Stewart, and Brown—have discountenanced it, and have described our moral approbation as a distinct elementary portion of mental consciousness. Dr. Chalmers, who lately filled one of those chairs, has broadly stated in his *Bridgewater Treatise*, that “virtue is not right because it is useful, but God hath made it useful because it is right;” * and still more lately, Professor Whewell, at Cambridge, has preached and published a series of discourses, whose object is to remove the work of Paley from its place in that university, because Paley rejected what, to such a mind as his, must have appeared the mystical tenet of an absolute moral *rightness* in human actions, above, and independent of, that character they obtain from mankind by their being conducive to happiness. If, therefore, the doctrine I here advocate be the correct one, my efforts to explain it may be feeble and imperfect,—they cannot be uncalled for. That doctrine is harmless at least. It neither disputes, nor impairs, the authority of conscience. With the *religious* obligation generally implied in the term

* Vol. ii. p. 72.

conscience, it does not at all interfere; it merely asserts that *moral* obligation is not a direct experience of the individual mind, as pain and pleasure are direct experiences of the sentient being, but describes it as a sentiment which, by the inevitable operation of the controlling influences of society, is planted by all in the bosom of each, to the good both of himself and the community.

The writers who have best expounded this theory, have connected it with metaphysical speculations of a subtle and disputable character. It has been taught by those who have been solicitous to resolve almost all mental phenomena into the association of ideas. I am desirous of separating it from these bolder speculations, on the correctness of which it by no means depends. It is not necessary for the task before me to determine how far, within what limits, and under what conditions, the principle of association is to be applied to the explanation of mental phenomena; and if I have occasion to use the term association of ideas, I shall in the employment of it be merely referring to a fact in our mental constitution familiar to all men, and a matter of universal observation; I shall not be calling on the reader to recognize this fact in the shape it assumes in certain metaphysical lucubrations,—in the form it there takes of a most wide generalization.

I have no wish to exaggerate the importance of the topic I have here undertaken to discuss. As far as the actual moral conduct of an individual is con-

cerned, it may be a matter of little or no moment which opinion he holds, or whether he holds any opinion whatever, upon this question of the origin of our moral sentiments;—I will content myself with suggesting that in all inquiries and speculations touching the condition and prospects of society, in all discourse on the characters of men, on the manners of communities, on laws, and government, there is no topic on which clear ideas are more available than this of the theory of morals. May I be permitted to add, that the investigation of it is all but indispensable to the student of jurisprudence, whose subject brings him perpetually on the borders of pure ethics?

Throughout the whole of this Essay I must entreat the reader to bear in mind that a separation is here made between religion and morality for the sake only of accurate examination. Practically they are, and must, and ought to be perpetually blended. And if any one should be of opinion that the description here given of moral obligation has rendered still more evident to his mind the importance and necessity of this connection—with him I have no controversy: he is at liberty, with my cordial acquiescence, to estimate at what height he will the still unestimated value of the sentiment of piety.

CHAPTER I.

Statement of the Theory.—Right and Wrong.

THE moral sentiment, long cultivated and highly excited, like every other strong and habitual feeling, presents itself at once as a simple impulse or energy of the mind, controlling, directing, impelling, without time given to refer to those circumstances which would justify or explain its presence. For this reason, and because moreover, from the very quarter, as will be shown, whence it comes, it is an antagonist in their turns to every passion and desire, it has been regarded, naturally enough, as an altogether separate element in our mental constitution. The feeling of responsibility appears to issue at once full formed from the recesses of the individual mind. Be happy! Be virtuous! are described as two distinct commands of nature—two great dictates of our being;—which in general are in perfect harmony, but of which the second is to take precedence whenever that harmony is disturbed. Now as an account of what is immediately felt by the moral man, this is not inaccurate. There are these two commands, Be happy! Be virtuous! and the second, from its nature, domineers over the first. But, nevertheless,

the second, we say, is in fact a modification of the first; and this moral sentiment, however authoritative, is but a result of the play of our desires and the exercise of our reason, under a social condition of existence.

That anger and resentment follow on inflicted pain, and gratitude on bestowed pleasure,—that we love the agent of good, and hate the author of our calamity,—that, carrying forward our feelings with the generalizations of the reason, we approve and esteem those affections and dispositions which produce happiness, and detest and disapprove such as occasion misery;—these are indisputable facts, which hardly admit, and certainly do not here require, any further explanation than is conveyed in the bare statement of them. That we also sympathize with the enjoyment and suffering, love and resentment of others, is a fact quite as undeniable. Our passions come back to us reflected from the countenance, the gestures, the language of our fellow-creature; and the injury inflicted upon one calls down the anger and resentment, not only of all who may be in any way affected by it, but even of mere spectators. We are abundantly prepared to enter into the contests, or griefs, or triumphs of our fellow-men.

In all this, however, we observe no moral feeling. We have pleasure and pain, love and hate, and we have sympathy in these passions; but sympathy (as several writers have had occasion to remark in their strictures on the theory of Adam Smith) cannot of

itself add a new character to the feelings we are made by it to partake. We have approbation, therefore, of this or that conduct, but not a *moral* approbation; actions are good and bad, affections are esteemed or detested, but neither have yet received the designation of *right* or *wrong*.

But the facts which have been enumerated immediately give rise to the moral sentiment we are looking for. The good action is universally rewarded and required; the bad is as universally resented and denounced; the one by the general voice is commanded, the other by the general voice, forbidden. Thenceforward he who reflects upon his actions must associate with them the approval or condemnation of mankind; nor can he regard the actions of other men but as subject to the same wide and general authority as his own. A new feeling with respect to human conduct,—a sentiment of *obligation*,—has arisen in each individual mind, thus pressed upon by a surrounding society. The connexion of this sentiment with the good or bad action, is expressed in the terms *right* and *wrong*. This new feeling, if we consider of what importance men are to men, and that they have a palpable, inalienable, perpetual interest in each other's conduct, we cannot fail to perceive must be one of very strong and permanent nature. It is associated with our actions, whether performed or contemplated; and by this, its constant and repeated association, it becomes oftentimes more distinctly connected in

the mind with the conduct to be enforced, than with that social body whose controlling power is exercised in many varied, uncertain, and indirect methods.

This feeling passes under many names, as it submits to many modifications; and we speak with an excusable because unavoidable ambiguity, sometimes in the singular number, of the moral sentiment, and sometimes in the plural, of the moral sentiments. It bears the name of moral *obligation* when we contemplate some act as yet to be performed; it is the sense of *merit* or *demerit* when some past action is reflected on; if we allude more particularly to the agent, it is described as a *feeling* of obligation; if the act to which that feeling is appropriate is the immediate subject of consideration, it is involved in such expressions as a *judgment* or *perception* of right and wrong.

There are two parts in this brief account which must be kept carefully distinct. 1. The spontaneous approval or disapproval which arises in each individual on contemplating actions and affections productive of pleasure or pain to themselves or others; and, 2. The feeling of obligation which is superadded to this spontaneous sentiment, and which is imposed on each by the general voice of society. The moral approbation we actually feel is a combination of the two. This distinction between a spontaneous and a moral approbation, is quite overlooked by those eager reasoners who first detail some act of parricide, or other deed of mingled horror and

agony, and then triumphantly ask, whether any mortal would need a reference to the opinion of others before he disapproved and resented the outrage. Certainly not. He would instantly recoil from and denounce the deed; and it is precisely because he and all others feel and express this instantaneous abhorrence, that any one who henceforward contemplates such a transaction, views it clad not only in its native horrors, but invested also with the gathered execration of mankind. The opinion of society (with the social influences which are included under that expression) does not constitute actions to be good or bad, amiable or detestable, which they must previously have been in order that such an opinion should exist, but it superinduces a new feeling of obligation to perform or restrain from those actions; it makes *good* and *bad* to be also *right* and *wrong*.

It is only necessary to keep this distinction in view, to obviate another objection heard sometimes from a higher quarter, and from philosophical authorities of greater weight. It is sometimes contended that a moral sentiment exists intuitively in each individual mind, and is not derived from public opinion, on this ground—that as public opinion is nothing more than the aggregate of many private opinions, such a sentiment could never have constituted, as it evidently does, a part of public opinion, unless it had first existed in men individually. But the opinion spoken of, as originating the moral

sentiment, is that spontaneous approval, or disapproval, resulting from the pleasurable and painful of human life;—not that complex opinion which actually exists when each member of society, becoming, so to speak, *moralized* by his social position, brings back into the community opinions invested with an authority derived from that very community. Right and wrong are good and evil with the authoritative stamp of general approval. The *gold* of the country circulates as *coin*; but it was gold before it was coin, and it was made coin, and received the impress of the public mint, because of its intrinsic value.

There is another misunderstanding attendant upon this theory of morals, which must here be taken notice of. The general welfare is, according to it, the acknowledged test whereby to determine the propriety with which our moral feelings are attached to instances of human conduct; but it does not follow, as some evidently suppose, that reasonings on the general welfare must therefore have necessarily preceded the formation of a moral sentiment. The natural passions, the gratitude, and resentment, and sympathies of mankind, would be sufficient to produce a state of opinion from which each member of the community would derive a feeling of moral restraint. Reasonings upon public utility must indeed have their place in every conceivable condition of society; but so far from founding mainly upon them the existence of a moral sentiment, it would be

nearer the truth to say, that the presence of this moral sentiment prompted to such reasonings. For when the question arose how this moral power of society was to be directed, then would ensue some systematic inquiry into the public good. Many and various are the sources from which public opinion is fed—as various as human life itself;—we must not suppose that reason does all, as this objection would imply, or that any public opinion was ever formed by mere unreflecting passions without distinct efforts of reason.

Our ethical writers, adopting the phraseology of an eminent divine of the Church of England, have of late insisted, in a very emphatic manner, on the *supremacy* over all other affections of our nature, to which the moral sentiment lays claim. This supremacy, it is thought, cannot be explained unless the moral sentiment be considered to stand alone, as well in its origin, as its authority; for if, it is contended, our ordinary desires after happiness lay at the foundation of this sentiment, why should it possess an authority over all of them, and an authority so very different in *kind* from any one of them? But what is there in this claim put forth by the moral sentiment to supremacy and command, which does not inevitably follow from that origin here assigned to it? A sentiment imposed on us from without—by the voice of parents, neighbours, society—restraining oftentimes our strongest propensities—how can it fail to have an air of authority, and authority of a

very different *kind* from the desires it controls? What else is it but a command? What but domination? We may reject its control—we may cavil at its sentence—we may refuse to be governed—but we cannot make it other than a command, a governing power: it is this or nothing.

If any theorist—as the ancient Stoics appear to have done—will venture to assert that the moral feeling naturally exercises the same stern supremacy on all occasions—however subordinate the rule of action, and however strong and vehement the desire opposed to it—if he will assert that the sentiment of moral obligation calls unremittingly, and with the same magisterial voice for obedience to all its dictates alike, and under all circumstances—he is merely fabling. The power of the moral conscience—allowing for the diversities of individual character—is felt in proportion to the importance of the rule to be enforced. The moral control, as any one who reflects upon himself will become immediately aware, enters amongst our thoughts and projects with various degrees of power—sometimes being little more than a weight cast in to determine our choice between conflicting wishes and designs;—and our resistance to its authority may be easy or difficult, and may incur every conceivable gradation of suffering from the slightest regret to the most poignant remorse. The authority of conscience, in its nature and variations, in its strength and its weakness, is exactly such as its social origin would lead us to expect.

That this part of our mental constitution was intended for our guidance, and that the control and regulation of our desires was its allotted office, is just as true, whatever theory as to its origin we may adopt. The final cause of this sentiment is the same whatever psychological account we give of it. And the language which Dr. Butler has adopted from the schools of ancient philosophy, which describes virtue as living *according to nature*, though objectionable from its extreme ambiguity, may be used with all the meaning it is capable of bearing as well under either system of ethics.

Nor is it surprising, if we consider the manner of our introduction to it, that we do not immediately refer this feeling of restraint and command to the power and resentments of our fellow men. The difficulty, and indeed the necessity, in any instance, of a mental analysis, arises from this, that the order of time in which certain feelings were originally developed is no longer apparent. Each man when he comes to look abroad upon society, or to reflect upon his own mind, finds himself in a scene of extreme complexity, surrounded by a mechanism the most intricate, and in unceasing operation. All is now complex, both in the scene and the observer; and feelings which are the result of long social communion, or curious associations of thought, stand out as prominently to view as the most simple emotions. With respect to the moral feelings, we were introduced to these as they exist in their last and mature

stage. He who taught us of *right* and of *wrong*, taught us not as from himself, but as the representative of some other power, which, however, he never disclosed;—he had forgotten, or had not traced, or would not think of describing, the source of that feeling of reverence he was communicating, and which he was pressing on us by the mandate of parents, and friends, and society, as something which parents, and friends, and society enforced, saying nothing of their being the sole sustainers and authors of it. Such being the manner of our instruction, what wonder if when we come to reflect upon our own minds, we should discover there a vague sentiment of duty, but not detect so readily the power to which obedience is due? It was just such a vague sentiment we in fact received. We received it as a sentiment already existing in the minds of others, and which was to be enforced on us by the rewards of society.

Before I close this chapter I would take notice of another ambiguity of speech which it is necessary to be on our guard against. It is common to apply such terms as virtue and merit to actions which flow from kind affections and spontaneous benevolence, as well as to those which are accompanied in the mind of the agent by a moral feeling, a sense of duty. Men desire of their fellow-men a certain conduct, but they are little solicitous whether it flows from the mere affection of the mind, or is due to the sentiment of moral obligation. They even

in some cases esteem it the more the more spontaneous it appears. They have no motive, at all events, for making a very nice distinction between those cases where the sense of duty has been predominant, and those where it has been absent, or its secondary influence has been scarcely felt; and if they had an interest in so doing, they could not possibly obtain such an insight into other men's minds as to enable them to adjudicate on so delicate a matter. They therefore, unavoidably, apply the same expressions of praise and censure to both classes of conduct, and this leads sometimes to a little perplexity. For instance, it is asked, Is an action springing from the simple feeling of benevolence to be described as virtuous? It is certainly virtuous, inasmuch as it is the very description of conduct which excites the approbation of mankind, and which they are solicitous to promote; but it is not virtue in another sense, because it is not an act done in obedience to moral obligation. This ambiguity of expression has led also to some partial theories. It is owing, I suspect, to this application of the term virtue as well to spontaneous affections of the mind, as to conduct connected with a sense of duty, that some theorists (our Shaftesbury for instance) have been induced to look no further for the origin of the sentiment of moral approbation than to the contemplation of the good affection itself, which seemed invested with a certain charm they called the beauty of virtue.

CHAPTER II.

Statement of the Theory continued.—Self-approbation.

I HAVE reserved for a separate chapter a consideration of the well-known fact in our moral nature, that self-approbation will oftentimes impel us quite independently of, and even in opposition to, the approving voice of society. "How can you ascribe," the objector will say, "to the good opinion of society that virtue which calls for the sacrifice, not of some desire which is yielded to secure that good opinion, but for the sacrifice of this very good opinion itself? You must look without the pale of society for the origin of such a sentiment as this."

I have no wish to throw a cold and sceptical regard on the virtues of mankind—I have a large faith in what the human being is capable of, and can easily divine in what bold proportions our moral nature, both for good and for evil, may be cast. It is no wish of mine to cavil with, or throw the least suspicion upon those sublime and affecting descriptions of virtue which are the delight of the poet as well as the moralist. I simply maintain, as a psychological truth, that the most absolute self-government, the proudest sense of merit which ever animated the

moral hero, is but a modification of the feeling already described, and may be traced, without any very subtle or laborious analysis, to its origin in the approbation of his fellow-men.

Society, as already has been said, affords not only a theatre, a scope, an occasion for the moral feelings, but it is the very originator of them. Man imposes them on man. Exalt the moral sentiment to what height, and place it in what position you please, it will still point to society as its author. Virtue shall be elevated, if you will, on its own pedestal, in solitary grandeur, remote from the acclamations of mankind, serene, abandoned, visited only by the airs of Heaven—I will not dispute the fidelity of your description—such a form of moral heroism there may be—but this I know, that he who stands before and contemplates it, must irresistibly infer that society was once there—that the crowd of men once circled round the base of that majestic figure—and that the hum of human applause was heard as the idol rose to its now solitary eminence.

And first, let me observe that there can be no greater difficulty in tracing the self-approbation that arises when we reflect upon our *moral* qualities, to the approval of mankind, than in tracing to the same source the sense of self-satisfaction we experience on reflecting upon any other quality we may possess,—as any talent, skill, or accomplishment,—which has earned for us the applause and consideration of men. Self-approbation can only be the knowledge that

others approve, or will approve. We cannot be at all times listening to the voice of praise—it comes only at intervals—but we can at all times, and in all places, enjoy the reflection that we possess in our character or history that which will secure to us a sentence of approval. This feeling need not be enjoyed in society, though society gives it birth; it accompanies the individual into whatever solitude he may plunge, it clings by him in whatever adversity he may fall. The sense of merit, desert, approbation—(I sometimes multiply expressions lest the omission of a moral phrase should be construed into the forgetfulness of a moral truth)—these become associated beyond all power of separation with his past life, or present designs, with every act of self-review, or resolution for future conduct.

But how happens it that this self-approbation, if thus derived from the approbation of society, should support the moral agent in independence of, and even in opposition to, the applause and favour of society? I proceed to mention some of the circumstances which give to this sentiment the independent bearing it is observed occasionally to assume,—so that the man's own approval, or consciousness of merit, compensates for the silence or even the reproaches of others.

I. There is but one sure way of obtaining the approbation of men, namely, by deserving it, by really possessing, and not only pretending to, those qualities on which it is bestowed. And praise, when

gained in any other way, and divorced from the consciousness of deserving it, is a momentary, precarious gratification, alloyed even while it lasts with anticipations of a retributive contempt and indignation. But though it is true that the only means for securing, is really to deserve, the good opinion and good will of mankind, it does not follow that every individual act obtains immediately its proper estimation and reward. Human life proceeds after no such exact method; or rather it has another method of its own. Our actions flowing from a hidden source—from motives liable, even by candid observers, to misconstruction—and our conduct being such as sometimes to require time and intervening circumstances for the full disclosure of its real nature—it happens that a separation occasionally takes place between virtue and the rewards confessedly due to virtue. Such a separation, however, is only temporary. The virtuous man has to wait—he is thrown back upon his mere title—but the truth is sooner or later discovered—the unjust sentence is reversed, and society redresses the brief wrong it had inflicted. Meanwhile what upholds him in these intervals of obscurity and disgrace? What, but the conviction that he really deserves what as yet is denied to him—what but the consciousness that with discovered truth his merit also must be discovered. He was the true prince after all; and was perhaps never prouder of his rank than when walking in humble or opprobrious disguise. Thus the partial

error, the uncertainty, and conflict of human judgments, which seem at first sight to threaten confusion to the moral world, train and discipline the mind to that high and noble character which owns itself pledged to virtue, but not to fortune, or even to man.

II. This consciousness of merit becomes of necessity to the moral man a distinct object of complacence and self-gratulation, and the preservation of it a perpetual care and solicitude. It is his proud title to precedence amongst the ranks of men, which he would on no account forfeit or endanger. Now the longer and more consistently a high moral character has been sustained, the more precious does it become, and the more liable to damage; so that a departure from rectitude, in all its other consequences quite trivial, might inflict the deepest injury on this delicate possession. The blow would be struck on no coarse marble scarce hewn from the quarry, but on the polished sculpture fresh from the hands of a Praxiteles. What is one more falsehood to the common liar? What has he to lose by it, and something may be gained? But to the man of untarnished honour, who has earned by a long life a reputation for sincerity and truth, a lie uttered, though its falsehood at the time should be known only to himself, may occasion the most poignant regret; it not only *may*, at some future time, shake his credit with mankind, and give their full triumph to the envious and malignant, but it disturbs that inward complacency he had learned to value for itself. Can

we wonder if a mind thus educated should refuse to desert the really meritorious in human conduct, although his adherence to it incurred nothing but reproach from those immediately around him?—especially, as with this love of virtue, the passion for posthumous fame may be united, and the appeal be made to posterity, and to the wise in all ages, to reverse the decision of ignorant spectators.

III. I need not here explain at any length how, from the operation of habit, and the exercise of reason in classifying analogous cases, a *rule* of action is in all minds invariably formed. This tendency to frame and sustain general rules is further authorized by the manifest utility of such guides amidst the rapid and intricate affairs of life—and this, as well to fix and concentrate the force of opinion by enabling men to judge of others with uniformity, as to direct the agent himself. What I am at present concerned to point out to the reader is—that the habit of acting by a rule or principle has the effect of liberating the mind of the moral man from a felt subserviency to the control of society. An habitual respect to the canon of morality draws attention to the rule itself, rather than to the power which would enforce it. The agent soon ceases to calculate on each occasion the good and evil consequences likely to result to himself from obedience or infraction of the law;—he escapes from the sense of intimidation, and having adopted as self-regulation what at first was imposed as a control from without, he yields a free and liberal

submission, a loyalty, not a servitude, to the claims and power of morality.

By such processes as these the mind is disciplined to rise even above the precepts of society, and to be a law unto itself. It voluntarily assumes the highest standard of moral excellence, carrying forward its sentiment of duty into the exertations of its own reason. The man becomes society to himself. He performs its office of judging wisely, as well as his own of acting with finished propriety.

The Lanistæ, we are told, whose office it was to prepare the gladiators for those sanguinary games to which they were so cruelly coerced, not only taught them the use of their weapon, but instructed them also how to fall gracefully when wounded, and to die in a pictorial attitude. If we were further told that the gladiator practised in dying the lesson he had learned, and strove by the graceful posture in which he sunk to death, to earn an applause which would ring upon his ears when insensible to all sounds alike, we should not discredit our information from any inherent improbability in the fact. And surely it may be easily understood how a virtuous man would persist in acting upon *his* love of honourable distinction in utter disregard even of coming dissolution. Nor need he *calculate* that life without honour would to him be worthless;—we live our old lives up to the last;—he would continue to be the man of virtue while he continued to exist.

We must not suppose, however, that it is in the

breast of heroes only that this refinement of the moral sentiment is detected. It mingles with humbler motives, and animates the performance of ordinary duties. As there is probably no virtue so lofty and heroic as not to be pleased with the audible voice of applause, so there is perhaps no virtue so lowly, so merely prudential in its nature, as not to share in some measure that inward satisfaction which survives apart from immediate approbation. The two forms of moral feeling exist together, and the one graduates into the other. And let me add, that no man, because he views with just admiration the magnanimity of that virtue which suffices to itself, and is its own reward, ought to yield therefore a cold and reluctant praise to that humbler sentiment which clings with close dependence to the approbation of neighbours and of fellow-men. This last is the more frequent and perhaps the safer guide. He who should take his conscience altogether from the keeping of society would place it in a perilous position. His proud independence might operate for evil, as well as for good. There is a limit to the boldness of virtue, and just on the other side of the boundary lies the boldness of crime.

I must be permitted to dwell a little longer on the topic of this chapter, because the misapprehension which surrounds it, is one chief cause of that distrust and aversion with which the theory of morals, I am endeavouring to elucidate, is often regarded. We hear it repeatedly said, that this reference to

public opinion as the origin of the moral sentiment accounts for, and therefore allows of no more elevated motive than a shifting, subservient, calculating prudence—that it utterly displaces the dignified sentiment of self-reliance, of self-esteem, and throws the abandoned spirit on the fluctuating tide of opinion “to rot itself with motion.” This is a great error. The theory I am describing not only admits the existence, but demonstrates the necessary development, to some extent at least, of this higher sentiment; it shows that this self-approbation, this solicitous preservation of a consciousness of merit, though no element of the individual, isolated being, is the sure result of a social condition.

Society is something more than the combination of men for their common benefit; it is the building up, the developing, the creating of the individual man. Through society he learns to reflect, not only morally, but in any manner whatever, upon himself. Moving on in order and regularity to the order and regularity of external nature, a solitary intelligence—we must not call it man—would have taken scarce any notice of itself. Surrounded by no fellow beings in whom to see its own passions reflected, and having no objects with which to compare itself, such a creature would have enjoyed, or suffered, with hardly a thought beyond the actual transitory sensation. Pleasure and pain might have succeeded each other—objects of desire anticipated in its span-long futurity might have stimulated a fitful energy—but

time would have lapsed without reflection, with scarce a remembrance, and the past would have fallen as it went by into sudden and total oblivion. What indeed were the irrevocable past to a solitary being? Of an act completed, the memory of which could call no blush, could excite no pride, why should he take further notice? If ideas pleasurable or painful were revived in his mind, it would be in the form of imagination, rather than of memory, so loose and faint would be the sense of personal relationship—so little in fact would he think of a *self*.

But if we transfer our solitary being into the well-knit community of kindred spirits, how is the picture altered! He sees others—he sees himself. The eye of society has looked upon his doings, its voice applauded or condemned, and the acted thought no longer sinks down into blank vacancy, but survives and lives for ever as the object of agreeable or tormenting reflection. The past is not that utterly separate and by-gone experience, as indifferent to him as any the remotest imagination of the mind; it is the burden he must bear, the glory he may boast. That *self*, which once travelled on a scarce noticeable point between the past and future, now extends its aggravated sensibility over both regions of time. He has a great charge imposed on him—even himself—and the care of a long happiness to provide for.

The life of some indolent and passionate savages

—with whom society has scarce any coherence but what it derives from war, that first cement of nations—presents us with a remote resemblance to the imaginary state I have depicted. Reflection on themselves, as beings whose interests they are permanently to consult, rarely occurs to them. With passions that reluctantly acknowledge any obstacle but that of physical impossibility, with desires after pleasure strong and untameable, there is little love of life,—there is an utter recklessness of that existence, which is the source or the condition of all passion and all pleasure. On the thing desired all their heart is set; on the mind within, the subject, or the summary, of all desires, not a thought is wasted. They themselves lie loose and self-abandoned. It is society which *individualizes*—which makes us of value to ourselves. And to refer more particularly to the moral nature of man, it is by feeling that chain which the community draws around him that the individual fully recognizes himself, and learns what greatness may reside in a single human being. The same power which breaks and subdues to obedience, also elevates to self-respect; and the world, after having bound and tutored its pupil to its own service and allegiance, throws him back in an attitude of proud reliance upon himself.

CHAPTER III.

The Theory applied to admitted Facts relative to the Moral Nature of Man.

A MENTAL theory, or description, proves itself by its accordance with what the consciousness, when accurately questioned, reports; but it admits also of further confirmation by the explanation it affords of ulterior facts recognized in the general experience of mankind. Having stated, to the best of my power, in a short compass, the theory of the moral sentiment here supported, I proceed to point out, in a few instances, how easy and complete is the application of this theory to the undoubted realities of life; and how difficult, embarrassing, if not impossible, is any such application of the rival doctrine of a simple primary sentiment of moral approbation.

The slightest acquaintance with history or with foreign countries, reveals to us variations more or less striking in the moral notions of mankind. While certain great and fundamental principles remain unaltered and unalterable, the moral code, in its specific enactments, exhibits considerable diversity, as we pass from age to age, or from country to country.

Now both this constancy and this mutability are with ease accounted for by the social origin here ascribed to the moral sentiment. Society, in its essential characteristics, is the same in all ages, and yet in all ages will manifest shades of difference. It must always be the same as long as it is a union of beings who have the same senses, appetites, and passions, who find their safety in mutual control, and put forth their power by the co-operation of numbers; and it must needs exhibit diversities corresponding to the different circumstances of soil and climate, and the various degrees of knowledge, under which men are destined to live. How plainly it follows from this nature of society, that while the obligation it imposes to do and to forbear will at all times embrace the greatest interests of humanity, it will not at all times be attached to exactly the same conduct, or to the same conduct in exactly the same degree. In a warlike age, in a country begirt with enemies, valour and virtue are synonymous; and he who can best kill and take captive is the moral hero of the times. In a period of peace and established civilization, another species of moral heroism appears upon the scene, and divides the suffrages of mankind; and he who visits prisons, and relieves the sick and afflicted, and unfetters the slave, and instructs the ignorant, is pre-eminently the virtuous man. Each virtue is called forth at the season of its greatest need, by the cordial approbation of those who feel that need; and not only do virtues change

their place in the scale of approbation, but owing to an extreme rudeness of the scheme of life, and the predominance of animal necessities, a species of conduct has in early times been regarded as virtuous, which later ages have stigmatised as vice.

Those who attempt to explain these variations in the code of ethics, and yet retain their principle of an intuitive sentiment of moral approbation, proceed under great, if not insuperable, difficulties. Such a sentiment as they describe lies, by its nature, at the very basis of human knowledge—it should itself be the great creator of public opinion, and not submit so signally to modification from other sources of that opinion. It is indeed fairly argued that this intuitive sentiment must have its proper object placed before it; and the absence of its exciting cause may be a very good reason why in certain circumstances it should not *act at all*;—but what reason is there why it should give contradictory verdicts?

This diversity, which ages and nations exhibit in their moral creed, is not to be regarded as an imperfection in the frame of society, as a topic of regret, or as a matter to be disguised with a timid and fruitless solicitude. We may not congratulate a given people on the circumstances which lead to their peculiar estimate of what is good or desirable, but, such estimate existing, it is no topic of regret that a social power is bestowed on them to secure the best happiness they know of. Why not here, as elsewhere, observe the wisdom of the Divine Archi-

tect, in the provision he has made for the continuance and welfare of society under every form it can assume? Why not observe with admiration that there is generated at all times in the communities of men a controlling power, indestructible and yet pliant to every variety of circumstance? Why not applaud the perfect union of stability with expansiveness seen in this natural government, which, while it establishes and makes tolerable each existing form of society, yet opens to receive under its protection the new wants and new intelligence of every generation?

Again:—it is a matter of common observation that the moral sentiment between nation and nation is extremely lax and inefficient. Scarce any trace of it is here to be found. Men who live habitually under the restraints of morality are observed when acting together as one community to be liberated entirely from such restraints. The sentiments of a few individuals of singular humanity or reflection form an immaterial exception. Between community and community all is lawful.

This fact is sufficiently intelligible if we recognise the origin of our moral sentiments in society itself. The member of society submits to the will of that community which in so many ways can reward and punish him. But if that community contain within itself its sources of prosperity, what should unite it in social compact with any other community? Two bodies of men thus situated can gain from each other

only by pillage or subjugation. People against people is as one man against one man; nay, the relation is of a still harsher character, for one man to another might be benevolent as well as tyrannical, but a community of men exhaust their benevolence amongst themselves, and have nothing but cupidity and ambition for their neighbour community. It is not till nations begin to discover a mutual interest in the preservation of peace—till commerce by gratifying reciprocal wants has produced its jealous union between them—or a common danger has drawn them into combination—that any shadow of morality is observable in their intercourse. Then something like a society of nations is created, and another law than that of mere strength raises its faint and timid voice amidst the contests of states and kingdoms.

But this peculiar laxity of international ethics seems to admit of no explanation on the theory of an intuitive sentiment of morals. It cannot be said here that the occasion is not presented for the exercise of the moral faculty; nor can the case be explained by the supposed effect of long and perverse habits. The palpable circumstances of life are placed at once before the full-grown power—the cultured susceptibility,—and it fails—it does not act. This moral faculty cannot be influenced, it seems, from the other side of a political boundary. What shall we say? Are national affairs of too great magnitude for its apprehension? or since national interests must call forth a greater number of judg-

ments than are ordinarily directed to any one point, shall we say that the moral sentiment, in contradiction to the law which governs all other feelings, becomes inappreciably minute by reason of its being simultaneously shared by so large a multitude?

It is another indisputable fact recognised in the moral nature of man, that the several virtues, as temperance, justice, benevolence, although all alike virtues, have attached to them a very different sense of obligation—are viewed with very different feelings of moral approbation. The degree or kind of obligation severally affixed to them is such as would result from a command of society founded on the several parts they perform in human life; but is not of that uniform description we might expect if a single moral susceptibility imparted to them, or made us acquainted with, their quality of right or wrong. Temperance, or the moderation of our desires, though of great indirect importance to other men, more ostensibly and immediately concerns the welfare of the individual himself. It is therefore commended, but commended in a very different spirit to that in which benevolence is greeted, which bestows a direct boon upon others; while justice, which satisfies a demand or expectation, receives a different approbation, and is called for by a different obligation from either. This diversity in the obligation attached to the several virtues, accords entirely with the supposition that they became virtues by having drawn upon themselves, through their

several offices, the good opinion of mankind—but it ill accords with the hypothesis that the sentiment of obligation is the simple product of a certain moral susceptibility.

Justice, I must observe, is not to be distinguished from benevolence (as by some writers it has been stated) merely by being that branch of good conduct which the laws of the country have taken upon them to enforce. Jurisprudence, no doubt, has rendered the line distinct (otherwise very obscure) between what is described as an act of justice, and what passes under the names of gratitude and beneficence—between what, in scholastic terms, is called a perfect and an imperfect obligation. But there is an intrinsic difference in actions themselves, which, prior to, or besides all positive law, leads to a difference of moral sentiment entertained towards them. There are actions which, from their nature, are not only commended, but the contrary of which kindle a general resentment, and consequently incur retribution: these are of perfect obligation; the moral motive being of a compulsory description as well as persuasive. Other actions are greeted with admiration and applause, but the non-performance of them excites no general resentment: these are of imperfect obligation; the moral motive being constituted only, or chiefly, of rewards, and being of a promotive and persuasive description. When we speak of *natural rights* and *natural justice*, we intend to mark out a species of conduct which, prior to all attempts at

jurisprudence, would have been enforced by a common resentment.

Morality and law are most intimately blended, but we must not confound them. Morality is that law which is marked out by public opinion, and sustained by the indefinite rewards and punishments of a numerous society. It is a great comprehensive duty of morality to obey the statute; it is a great office of jurisprudence to direct, determine, and enlarge the public opinion. Morality erects, displays, supports the book of the laws, but leans for support herself upon the open volume, from which she learns and teaches at the same time.

I proceed to mention another instance of the applicability of our theory to the real experience of men. It is a fact which will not be disputed, that there is a vast difference between the remorse felt when a crime has been actually committed, and when its perpetration, though fully resolved on, has been accidentally defeated. The real murderer experiences a very different remorse from him whose murderous intention has been balked by some unlooked-for occurrence. In this last person, the sentiment of remorse may be almost entirely overpowered by one of joy, at having escaped the commission of so heinous and penal an offence. Yet the guilt, all moralists tell us, lies in the intention, which in both individuals might have been equally determined, equally malignant. How is this discrepancy to be explained?

On our system the solution is at hand. The intention of an agent is, indeed, that which the judgment of a rational society is chiefly levelled against—the intention is the very cause of the injury, and it betrays a mind within likely to be the source of similar injuries; but while society directs its displeasure to the intention of the criminal, with the criminal himself it is not *his intention*, but the judgment of society that is the source of that moral awe by which he is impressed. While, therefore, nothing but a murderous thought, hidden from all observers, has passed through his mind, he is free;—if he is not a religious man, he goes on his way quite at liberty. But if no accidental hindrance has occurred—if his hand by the irrevocable deed has made manifest the villany within—he then lies exposed to the terrors of a moral remorse. Even if the crime has been perpetrated most secretly, and with small chance of disclosure, still his heart will never be at peace: his fear will exaggerate the probability of detection; there will be standing out against him a fact, a truth, which the most trivial incident may bring forward into the light of day, and which, when revealed, will make him the object of horror and execration to all mankind.

But of this state of things, so obvious and indisputable, it would not be easy to give any intelligible account on the hypothesis of an intuitive sentiment of morality. Either the knowledge of the intention is or is not a necessary condition for the excitement

of this moral sentiment. If it is *not*, whence this peculiar criminality attached by all mankind to the intention of the agent? If it *is*, whence this comparative freedom from remorse in him whose crime has been prevented, but whose evil intention was quite mature?

These are a few of those admitted facts which might be appealed to as confirmatory of our theory; many others will suggest themselves to the reader. In short, the characters of men and of nations become intelligible to us through this theory. We see how inevitable are those different shades of morality that distinguish the different classes of society, whether those classes are marked out by similarity of age, sex, or profession. We can understand how it is that times of public calamity, induced by war, or plague, or famine,—when society is breaking up—how it is that such times, though favourable to religious impressions by reason of that insecurity of life and all its pleasures which accompanies them, are nevertheless distinguished by the utmost licentiousness, cruelty, and injustice; the injury done by interfering with the social restraint being greater than all the added sanctions of religion can repair. We have an explanation at hand of the moral peculiarities of the most dissimilar of men, from him who, thrown loose upon the surface of the world, bids the world make of him what it will, to him who walks as a pattern before all mankind, regulating each step, each thought, with unremitting

vigilance. The student of man, while he learns to confide in society, and in that power which it continually generates for its own preservation, learns also to observe, without alarm or dismay, in what bold proportions the several elements of humanity are occasionally combined—in what a free, broad, and unfettered style the landscape of the moral world has been sketched out by the hand of the great Designer. Nor will he be apt to tremble for morality, or to throw contempt and disparagement on its power and influence, because society fails to exhibit to him, in every part, that uniformity of plan, or regularity of detail, which, nevertheless, he may very laudably exert himself to promote.

I will make one more observation before quitting this branch of my subject;—let the difficulty of deciding what does or does not require particular mention on such a subject be my excuse, if here, or in any part of this essay, I trespass on the patience of the reader with remarks of a too obvious character. We have all of us far more to learn in the regulating and determining our moral judgments than, according to the hypothesis of an intuitive sentiment, we might have expected. We are spared no labour by this mysterious guide, and saved from no error. At all events, the formation of our judgments—the varied and fluctuating feelings we entertain at view of any transaction or character other than the most simple—are just such as respond to the account here given of moral approbation.

Ethical writers, having their attention fixed on one aspect of human nature, are apt to represent mankind as passing some *moral* judgment on all occasions when they applaud or condemn,—whereas the moral feeling is often absent and slow to be excited. I have previously pointed out the difference between that spontaneous approbation constituted of individual passion, as love, and hatred, and admiration,—and that moral approbation which is a union of this with an added sentiment resulting from the judgment of a society; which judgment is soon understood to be directed according to the general good and evil of human conduct. When we speak of the latter sentiment alone, we generally employ, I believe, the term *obligation*; the phrase *moral approbation* almost always imports the union I have described. Now in contemplating the actions (especially as might be expected of *other* men), on witnessing or hearing of the transactions of the world, the first is often the sole species of judgment we form; we are carried away by some passion or sympathy they excite, and it is not till we are reminded, or we take notice of their ultimate and general consequences, that we begin to regard them in a *moral manner*. We then often find ourselves obliged to condemn what had perhaps engaged our ardent admiration.

If the reader recalls to mind what he has felt when perusing any historian or poet, he will perceive that human character and conduct may interest most vividly, and yet give rise to no moral judgment.

This often lies dormant till some reference is made to the opinion of society, or to those serious considerations affecting its welfare which are known ultimately to direct that opinion; or till, by that happiest of all modes of thinking, we place ourselves in the position of the weak and suffering party in the transaction, and then, by feeling the injury, become engaged to find a protection against it in the general defence and advocacy of mankind. Till then nothing occupies the mind but what I have called the spontaneous approbation. I will not here insist that those who contend for a moral intuition may not find some explanation for what, on their hypothesis, appears to be, in such cases, its capricious absence; I content myself with observing, that what we feel on these occasions is quite in keeping with the supposition that no such intuition exists, and bears out completely the account which has been here given of the subject.

If an instance were required of the manner in which some quality, generally called moral, will, to the utter oblivion of all moral judgment whatever, attract and engross our admiration, perhaps one more striking could not be given than the effect produced on every reader of *Paradise Lost*, by Milton's portraiture of Satan, the proclaimed author of all evil. The wonderful fortitude, pride, and self-reliance of that terrific hero of our great poet, subdue us into a feeling of awe,—almost of passing reverence. When we behold him, as the poem opens, bringing to his new abode of darkness and of tor-

ture, "a mind not to be changed by time or place,"—refusing to succumb to anguish and defeat—standing erect amidst utter ruin and in prospect of interminable woe—his unshaken fortitude entirely arrests us; and the inexpressible gloom and even melancholy, which hang over it, only deepen the impression. For he is supported by no hope. The archangel has contended with the Highest—he has put forth all his strength—has fought—has failed; he has learned that that inscrutable Power which seemed upheld in Heaven mainly by "old repute," was indeed the Omnipotence tradition had reported. Henceforward it must be his lot to endure eternally whatever his all-powerful adversary chooses to inflict. And he *can* endure!

We should be led into a strange preposterous sympathy, if the admiration exacted from us by this appalling fortitude were not counterbalanced by other representations of the same fearful personage. In justice to the poet, it must be added, that this imposing strength of mind lasts only while the arch-criminal surveys the region of his punishment, and breathes defiance to his conqueror. When he looks *within*, there is no peace, and no possibility of peace; and when he discloses his own bosom, we shrink in horror from the spectacle. He has not lost his intellectual being: that high faculty of thought which sat with him on a throne in Heaven, is now a pursuing fury, and every exercise of reason serves, and can only serve, to

awake remorse, and the conflict of those passions which, like another chaos, must "for ever boil in that tumultuous breast." When, indeed, the arch-fiend walks through his infernal dwelling, and his dilated figure is seen to stride over its burning marle, he is a being superior to pain,—the lurid fires touch him not: they sink, and fade, and are forgotten in his presence;—but in the stillness and beauty of Paradise, beneath the light of Heaven, and within sight of happiness, the poison works, and his crime receives its dread, unmitigated, and inevitable punishment.

Yet to the last there attends on the character of Satan an awe and a respect but little accordant with the deeds in which he is engaged. And when he returns in most guilty triumph after his malicious overthrow of the happiness of man, and the poet has thought fit to dash his pride by transforming him in the midst of his monarchical state, both him and his compeers, into hissing and crawling serpents, we feel, I suspect, a strong repugnance to this sentence of humiliation. We are prepared to yield him to the thunders of Heaven, to see him transfixed to his rock, or chained beneath the gulf; but we are jealous of his greatness, and cannot endure that any circumstance should be associated with him of a mean and contemptible description.

CHAPTER IV.

*Of the Theory of an Intuitive Sentiment.—Some
Remarks on the Doctrine of Free-will.*

THE feeling of moral obligation attached to human conduct—the feeling we intimate when we say of this it is *right*, of that it is *wrong*—has here been deduced from the control exercised over us by our fellow-men; others have regarded it as the direct product of the individual mind. A distinct faculty, say they, or mental susceptibility, invests human conduct with this character of right and wrong, or, in other words, these moral qualities are recognised at once by a faculty or susceptibility. At what stage in the transactions of life this moral susceptibility is roused to pronounce its verdict,—whether it waits till all the facts are before it, and the motive and consequences are fully disclosed,—whether it first passes judgment on the acts of the man himself in whom it resides, or is awakened to exertion by contemplation of the acts of others—what, in short, are the necessary and sufficient occasions for its developement, I must leave those who teach its existence to decide; for I find myself, when

I would attempt a minute explanation of this part of their theory, involved in hopeless confusion.

The teachers of this psychological tenet, for the most part, uphold it as one of great, of vital importance. The mind thus endowed secures us an immutable morality, and reveals to us the eternal distinctions of right and wrong. The moral code is placed on a far different foundation from any which the interests and passions of life, and the ordinary reason of man, could possibly supply.

Is the exercise of reason on the tendencies of human actions superseded or not by the direct operation of this moral faculty? The terms in which the theory is usually proclaimed, or alluded to, would imply that this moral susceptibility rendered superfluous all such exercise of reason. It is spoken of as a sort of instinct complete in itself; and actions are right and wrong, just as objects are red and blue, because they are felt to be such; there is no other reason to be given for the distinction. According to this view we have only, in forming our opinions, to observe the intimations of this ethical susceptibility. There is no need, no place for reasoning; it is hard to understand how even the notion of reasoning upon moral subjects could have entered into the minds of men; for they do not ordinarily set themselves to prove that sweet is sweet, or bitter bitter. It is open to mankind to observe, as a matter of philosophical curiosity, that there is a *correspondence* between the dictates of this ethical suscep-

tibility, and the rule of conduct which secures the happiness of men; but they are not authorised to accommodate and correct their notions of right and wrong by any improvement made in their scheme of human felicity. The responsive movement is cut off between the conscience and the intellect.

But this interpretation of the theory would probably be resented by its more intelligent advocates. The existence of the sentiment *they* describe does not render superfluous or nugatory the exercise of reason; the exercise of reason may be one of the conditions of its development. The mind is at liberty in the exertion of all its faculties, but at every stage of its progress it is accompanied by the high sanction of an authority which does not displace, but attends on reason. But now if we relieve the theory from this absurdity of implying that all reasoning upon human conduct is superseded by the mysterious decisions of a moral instinct—if we suppose that this intuitive sentiment may be re-directed and transferred as new views are entertained, or more careful inquiries are made into the nature and consequences of human conduct—if we remove from the theory the utter repugnance which it otherwise would exhibit with the language and reasonings of every man, every day of his life—we have at the same time divested it of all the charm it had for the speculative mind—nor will it any longer answer the purpose for which it was so much extolled. The boast was, that it placed morality on another and

surer basis than could be found in the ordinary interests, and ordinary faculties of human nature; but it seems, after all, that the reason is exalted paramount the instinct, and the recognised interests of life are still in fact the foundation of the moral code. Nothing remains but an obscure, embarrassing, unintelligible doctrine of psychology; and one which has already been shewn inapplicable to explain those well-known facts of our moral nature which are established by the concurrence of all mankind. It may be said that, at all events, the *bare existence* of a moral feeling is secured to us by a theory which recognises it as an essential part of the human mind. But its mere existence has never been an object of concern—its purity, its force, its direction, these are the only topics of solicitude.

It is an intractable power, and one utterly beyond all art of management, that the philosopher here introduces amongst the primitive elements of our nature. Supporting himself, indeed, in the region of mere abstractions, the theorist may proclaim in lofty phrase the supremacy of a conscience to which all the affections of the heart are accountable, but which itself is not responsible for the happiness of man;—or he may refine and subtilize on a primary idea of right and wrong, got from some oracle of pure intelligence far aloof, and of a quite different order from that vulgar faculty of the understanding, whose web of knowledge is confessedly woven of the soiled and tangled threads of experience;—in all

this and much more eloquent theorising of the same description he may safely indulge, and his intellectual enthusiasm will wear a graceful and captivating air, for he dwells on a part of our nature which all men are disposed to foster and encourage in all other men, and to hear magnified and applauded in themselves; but if ever our philosopher should descend from this airy height of speculation, should come down amongst men to regulate the incessant contest of life, and prescribe rules for carrying it on, he must then drop, perforce, his intellectual romance;—his mysterious absolutism will be found of no avail,—and he must talk the language of that humble doctrine of general expediency which he is accustomed at other times to overwhelm with so sovereign a contempt. He will then be glad to recognise the existence of a moral sentiment ductile to reason, and proclaimed by its very nature to be subservient to human happiness.

There is mystery enough in and about our being—the world rolls on encompassed by it—and I am far from ranking myself with those who think there is no place and no recognition for it in a philosophic mind. But morality, which springs from and concerns the palpable business of men, ought not to be treated in a vein of mystery. Nothing is gained, even to our admiration, by endeavouring to invest our moral feelings at once in a sort of celestial panoply. The natural and true proportions of the human mind, as of the human form, contain, after all,

the only beauty; it is of little use to deck the figure of humanity with painted wings that cannot fly, to the hindrance and disparagement of the natural limbs which Heaven has assigned to it.

There is another statement of this theory which might possibly be insisted on. It might be said that there is an obligation in *reason itself*—that man, when he has discovered what is best, is *bound* by it. Thus the moral obligation may be represented as involved in the very exercise of the reasoning faculty. There is, indeed, an obligation, from the nature of the thing, involved in reason—the knowledge of what is best must bind a rational being. But this sort of obligation is by no means limited to morality. It attends the use of reason under all circumstances, and binds as well whether the act be or be not within the scope of moral approbation. There is an obligation in reason,—there is an obligation also in every desire that impels us.

It might seem to require some explanation if a tract upon the philosophy of ethics should take no notice of a topic supposed to be intimately involved in all inquiries into the nature of moral obligation or responsibility—namely, the freedom of the will. On a little consideration it will be seen that the problem of free-will is not peculiarly connected with the question here discussed—the origin of the moral sentiment. He who supports the doctrine of a moral intuition might with perfect consistency dispute the freedom of the will,—the old Stoics did,—while he

who should accord to the account here presented to him, might denounce the doctrine of necessity. I shall venture on two or three observations on this topic, which will have for their object to justify the absence of any laboured discussion of it, by shewing that a belief in the freedom of the will is by no means implied in the feeling of moral responsibility; and that this feeling remains the same, as indeed do all our feelings, whatever doctrine we hold on this singularly abstruse subject.

I. We must not suppose that the peculiar criminality attached to *intention* implies a tacit belief in the freedom of the will—it implies that man is a reasonable being—an agent having the power by the faculties within him of impressing a new direction on events—but it implies no peculiar tenet on the *modus operandi* of those faculties. It is to be observed that only by experience, or the tuition of those who have learned by experience, are we instructed to limit our resentment to actions which have been *intended*. Our anger is, in the first instance, quite indiscriminate, and, in the child, it fastens even upon inanimate objects which have been the occasion of its pain. Reflection limits our resentment to what the man, as man, has been the cause of—to what he, as a human agent, has performed; and our resentment is here retained and justified by its manifest necessity for self-defence against the continuance, or repetition, of the wrong. Our moral censure, which is but the general resent-

ment echoed from each man's lips, follows the same law as a private resentment; it is ultimately directed to the intention—it is fixed on the man—on the human agent. And what especially justifies our moral censure? Not the *free-will* of the agent—whether this be there or not—but the known *laws* of a rational being, by the operation of which it is believed that our reproof or punishment will prevent a repetition of the offence.

II. But it is said that we are *conscious* of this free-will, and therefore it must enter as an element into our moral calculations. And this is a favourite style of argument with those who maintain the doctrine itself. We are conscious, say they, of the freedom of the will—it is a matter of simple consciousness—it admits, from its nature, of no other proof than an appeal to consciousness. Now the matter in question is one which, from its nature, *cannot be* the subject of direct consciousness; it therefore cannot be decided by such an appeal; neither is it of necessity an element in our moral feelings. We may be conscious of *will*, not of the *freedom* of will. The question agitated is—whether the operations of the mind, like those of external nature, are ordered according to invariable laws, or whether this analogy is to be, at least in part, rejected, and a mode of operation predicated of the mind of a quite different description; a power being put forth altogether free, and beyond the scope, of law. Such a question must be decided by examina-

tion of recorded consciousness, and by thus detecting the law of their recurrence. Of the operations,—of the phenomena themselves of mind,—we are immediately conscious;—of the laws of these operations, of the fact that these phenomena have certain repeated sequences, we cannot be said to be conscious;—such a truth as this is the result of reflection and of a careful classification. As we cannot be conscious of a law, so neither can we be of the absence of a law. Whether a power be put forth under a law or not, cannot alter the simple consciousness we have in putting forth that power. The freedom of the will cannot possibly be a simple truth of the consciousness.

III. As an opinion, as a matter of reflection and inference, this doctrine cannot be supposed to have mingled with the current feelings of mankind. The question whether the mind exhibits an order and regularity corresponding to that of external nature, or whether, in any region of it, there is what might be termed a spontaneous generation, not subjected to any law of cause and effect—is one which would not occur but to reflective minds, nor till some steps had been taken towards a scientific examination of the material world. Any opinion, therefore, concerning it, could not be mingled up with feelings coeval with society. To the majority of men, indeed, in any age, the question has never occurred; nor does the language they employ, when speaking of the freedom of action, at all refer to this scholastic

dispute; it manifestly having no relation to freedom from their own mental laws, but freedom from external restraint.

IV. There is no correspondence between the imposition of moral responsibility and any limits that could be marked out for the operation of free-will. I need but suggest here that if we excused from moral responsibility the man who was *confessedly* under the influence of psychological laws, just as we excuse him who is under compulsion of physical restraint, the whole aspect of morality would be entirely altered.

V. There is a sense of mental freedom, it is true, and one which is especially the privilege of the moral man. It is a sense of freedom, not recognised in a single unconnected act, but elicited by the antagonism of reason and passion,—a sense of freedom, not from all psychological law, but from the overbearing control of some desire, or perverse habit. Whatever may be decided of the liberty of the *will*—a question which I do not presume to determine, and on which there is room for some curious argument quite foreign from the topic of this essay—this freedom of the *reason* is the only liberty worth having. This constitutes the true freedom of the *man*.

CHAPTER V.

*Objections to the foregoing Theory drawn from
supposed Practical Consequences.*

IF the theory I have been endeavouring here to expound were judged solely by its own merits—by the faithful representation it gives of what each man detects within himself, and observes in the world without, of the moral nature of man—there would be little doubt of its obtaining an immediate assent. But certain consequences hurtful to morals are imagined to follow the teaching of this theory, and certain inferences hostile to natural theology are thought deducible from its tenets, and these prepossessions, far more than any direct argumentative opposition, impede its reception. I am concerned to remove these impressions, not only for the sake of truth and an intelligible view of moral science, which is obstructed by their existence, but also to relieve myself and others, who seem to themselves to take a simple common-sense view of this subject, from the imputation of holding a doctrine which really justifies them.

We hear it objected to the theory which deduces our moral sentiments from social influences, that it

shakes the basis of morality—that it works the twofold mischief of rendering precarious the authority of conscience, and throwing uncertainty on the code of ethics. That the sentiment of moral responsibility should have originated in no other cause than the incessant and controlling influence of man on man, appears to some a most dangerous conclusion, and one which puts that sentiment in fearful jeopardy. What then! a motive which is inevitably called into being wherever society exists, has this but a weak foundation in humanity? Could it have a stronger? Does man live but in society? Is he any other than the product of society? What would be the development of the individual mind without the fellowship of others, or where would be the scope or meaning of a moral sentiment out of the circuit of social existence? Even if we carry our thoughts to a future world, and consider our moral feelings with relation to that futurity, does any one think that Heaven is a solitude? Surely society attends us there. It is granted that if a human being could escape to some desert, and throw off every habit of thought which fellowship, or communion with his kind had produced, he would also escape from moral feeling, and if he could exist in such a desolation, of what use were his morality?

The influence of society a weak, insufficient foundation for the moral sentiment! I entreat those who make the objection to consider what and how great a thing to man is the good opinion of his fellow-man.

It visits him in every relation of humanity, from parents, from children, from neighbours, from citizens;—it is equally present in life public and domestic;—it mingles with almost every enjoyment;—it is blended, either as object or as means, with every hope and every project of existence. From his earliest infancy to his latest breath the good opinion of mankind is the representative of how large a share of his happiness. He is born naked and defenceless into the lap of society. In the happy dependence of childhood all is gift, and every thing comes to him in the shape of benefaction. In that age a favourable opinion is attended, or rather expressed, by innumerable acts of kindness and endearment: “not words alone please then,” nor do words alone bestow the maternal approbation. As he advances to manhood a sense of self-reliance is called forth with growing powers and weightier cares;—he must exert himself,—but where is the field of his exertion? The first effort of the independent and liberated man is to secure his footing in the good opinion of that society, the least one of whom can add an injury if he cannot bestow a positive benefit. Whether he labours for subsistence, or toils for honours, or seeks employment only for restless talents, or the enjoyment only of descended wealth, it is through society he must effect his purpose. There are his judges before whom he runs, and rides, and displays every accomplishment, and every art, and from whom alone he expects his prize, be it what it may. Nor can any station,

however high, however low, remove him from the influence of the good opinion of society; and if the very highest and the very lowest of human conditions do, from different causes, abstract those on whom they fall from the control of their fellow-men, it is a common remark that this unfortunate freedom is almost sure to be detrimental to their moral character. Man lives,—for pleasure or for pain,—in deed or in thought,—in constant collision with his fellow-men; they are beings without whom he can do nothing, yet as they are beings of the same passions with himself they have conflicting claims; he must yield, he must compromise, must secure their friendship, must avert their enmity. A new want arises, perpetual, and that can never be shaken off—a want the summary of a thousand wants—the want of the good opinion of these fellow-men. Is this a motive, a part of our mental constitution, likely to fail us,—to grow weak and languid as society advances and becomes, as it does, more and more complicated? Is it likely to decay as the interests of life become more numerous, more keen, wide-spreading, and interwoven? God has set men to be rulers over men—all over each;—this is His moral government which he has, in the first instance, established upon the earth,—a government which must continue and improve with every improvement made in the means and knowledge of happiness,—a government which in its plan, and progress, and by its connection and harmony with other parts of the system of nature, claims to have sprung from the Author of creation.

As to the second branch of this objection, that our theory supplies us with no permanent code of morality, I answer that it supplies a code as permanent as the laws which regulate the pleasure and pain, the joys and sufferings of humanity. On these laws our moral distinctions are raised—on what broader or other basis would you rest them? Is there any fear that benevolence should prove hateful to all men, and malice instead be taken into universal favour?—or that industry, with all her fruits, should be decried, and a vacant barren sloth be honoured and approved? If by any possibility those actions which produce pleasure and enjoyment should change their nature, and give rise to pain and suffering, would you have an “immutable morality” forbidding enjoyment, and commanding all things miserable? The only immutable morality is this, that the happiness of all be protected and cultivated. This is a precept which knows no change,—an eternal truth, recognized, we may be sure, in every condition, in every region wherein reasonable beings have their abode; and the spirit of benevolence which animates this precept is that unchangeable goodness which is virtue everywhere—which is gold in all climes—that goodness which has its rest in the mind of the Eternal.

But the specific rules of morality are not pronounced to be permanent and unalterable. How could society advance if they were? The community undergoes a silent revolution in its moral ideas

as new tastes are generated, new passions raised, and new modes of existence and of thought are laid open; but alterations such as these, slow and scarce perceptible, cannot endanger the steady authority of morals. The sea and the dry land may be changing places, but nevertheless the sea and dry land are very distinguishable; the change is not inconsistent with the habitable nature of our globe, and each generation of mortals walks upon the shore neither deterred nor perplexed with sense of insecurity.

Another serious evil is apprehended, by some, to flow from our theory, inasmuch as it instructs men to analyze their own feelings. Granting its truth, say they, its prevalence would be the means of deteriorating that moral sentiment which it teaches men to trace to its origin in the good opinion of society. It would induce them to refer at once to that opinion as the real motive of their conduct—to dismiss from their minds the fastidious sentiment of self-approval,—and, silencing the unrelenting monitor within, to look out on each occasion to observe what would indeed be their palpable gain or loss by following virtue. But now if our theory be true—if the more refined and constant sentiment of the moral man, really originate from a desire to obtain the good opinion of others—then to fix his attention on that good opinion, is the sure way to obtain this sentiment. And so accordingly we find it. The sense of honour, which is the moral sentiment limited in its range, is educated, we plainly see, by the con-

stant appeal to the judgment of gentlemen and equals. Who for a moment ever suspected that he should enfeeble or endanger this sense of honour, by directing the mind of the young soldier to the opinion entertained of him by his fellow-soldiers? And thus also with the sentiment of self-approbation, which is but that of honour diffused over a larger class of duties: the only means of eliciting it, is by exciting a determination to secure (and to deserve, as the only method of securing) the esteem of society. This determination once formed and acted on, the force of habit does the rest; and the preservation of an unsullied character becomes, of necessity, a distinct and paramount object in life, and the source of highest gratification.

But it may still be urged—I push the objection to the utmost—that after the developement of this sentiment, and on any occasion, a familiarity with our analytic doctrine enables a man, by penetrating its very nature, and threading his way back to its source, to dissipate and eject it from his mind. In the first place, it is by no means desirable that the reason of man should be quelled and overmastered even by a moral feeling; which ought to be the ally of reason, not its substitute. Though, perhaps, there is little need for the caution, there may be a superstition in morality as well as in religion; and it is fit that even here the mind should have the power of overlooking its own operations, that they may be reconciled with reason and with happiness. But,

in the next place, this power of analysing a given sentiment cannot lead to its destruction, unless the subject of that analysis has sprung from a merely accidental, and therefore unauthorised, association of ideas, and is such, moreover, as the mind gladly relieves itself from. It is true, that an individual whilst engaged in the distinct, intellectual effort of analysing any feeling, cannot at that time be under its actuating control; but this intellectual effort concluded, his thoughts and passions resume their established course, and when those *facts themselves* are next contemplated from which the feeling resulted, then, if it was a legitimate indweller of the mind, does it immediately, and with its accustomed force, re-occupy its place. And besides, if the analyst were furnished by his scrutiny of the mental process with this destructive power, he must also be supplied with some motive for exerting it. Suppose, for instance, one should convince an affectionate father that the love he bears to his offspring is no separate instinct, but a result of the ordinary affections of his nature, developed under peculiar circumstances, and singularly favoured by habit, is it imaginable that this metaphysical pupil either *could* or *would* straightway divest himself of the strong feelings of his heart, and struggle to absolve himself from the dearest ties of life? When he next beheld his child, would not his paternal regard rush back upon him as instantaneously as before? Nay, would he not even find that the sentiment was rendered

more vivid from his having reflected on the many causes which authorized and confirmed it? Neither has the virtuous man, present him with what analysis we may, either the power, or the inclination, to expel from his mind that inward satisfaction which the propriety of his conduct and the blameless tenour of his life secures to him; but, on the contrary, that satisfaction must be heightened by contemplation of the numerous facts that produce and justify it.

A man disturbed by violent and unsatisfied passions, the dishonest man and the criminal, may wish to rid themselves of the restraint of shame; or the punitive feeling of remorse; and may have resort, amongst other expedients, to reasonings which shall, to their apprehension, disparage altogether the dignity of moral sentiments. This they may do, and without much help of philosophy, but they will gain little by the attempt. Plain palpable realities, not to be gainsaid or displaced by argument, will meet and dash their sophistry. Tones of contempt, the averted eye, denial and disservice encounter them whenever they mingle with their fellow-citizens. Their punishment depends on no very subtle association of ideas, neither is their shame so easily eluded. They find themselves in rude contact with the vigorous resentments of mankind. Society trusts not always, nor long, to self-inflicted penance; she is soon seen to take the scourge in her own hands.

I have dwelt the more on this objection because it

is a common topic of reproach against metaphysical studies, that the resolution of our nobler or more refined sentiments into primitive elements of thought, tends to their degradation or displacement. The reproach is unjust, and the alarm needless. When the feeling in question arises from constant and correlative laws of nature and of man, the analyst has no such power; he shews only that such a feeling must inevitably arise;—when it springs from some casual association of ideas, and is yet of a pleasurable description, the analyst, if he possesses such a power, has no motive for using it;—and when it has no other than such a casual origin, and answers no pleasurable or profitable end, it is a matter of pure congratulation if by any means it is expelled from the mind. There appears in some a vague notion that the dignity of our sentiments is, at all events, compromised by an analysis of them. But surely our feelings are not the noblest because most elementary; if so, simple sensation would be the highest prerogative of our nature. Nor can they be thought the less stable, the less permanently or certainly our own, because traceable to the operation of general and invariable laws.

The mind of man is replete with feelings of which he has recognized the origin, but which are not the less vigorous on that account. Without provoking any discussion on the genesis of the sentiment itself of the beautiful, it may be stated, as a fact admitted on all hands, that in most objects, the feeling of

beauty they create arises but in a small degree from their individual form and colour, and in a far greater from multiplied associations of agreeable thought. But the knowledge of this fact, and even the habit of investigating these curious combinations, by no means destroys the sentiment resulting from them. On the contrary, those persons appear to be not only the most accurate critics on all subjects of taste, but the most vividly to appreciate beauty in all its forms, who attend most to the hidden sources of that delightful feeling.

The finer order of poetry furnishes us with a continuous example of passion united with a detection of the secret sources of passion,—of feeling sustained by the force of reflection, and spread with solicitous art over all topics that it finds, or makes, kindred to itself. The poet is busy linking together, by his vagrant and wilful associations, all nature, and all art, and every object of cogitation, into new groups whereof the law of affinity is to be found in some sentiment of the human being. A man's heart is for a time the centre of the world. And curious enough it is to observe how slight and evanescent are those relations by which the master of language brings together his multitude of objects which produce, however, so harmonious an impression as, borne on his glowing words, they pass, many and fleet, over the surface of the mind. But the knowledge of all this fine and delicate process, never disturbed the pleasure of either poet or reader. They

never feared that their elegant literature would be destroyed by a subtle and metaphysical scrutiny. They might as well have trembled lest the natural philosopher by resolving the rainbow into its component parts—into rays of light bent and reflected through the drops of a thunder-shower—would have banished from the sky that exquisite meteor. Poetry, which is a sort of rainbow literature—beautiful, and born for its beauty—the fair offspring of most conflicting and inconstant elements—still throws its radiance over life—is still seen upon the cloud—however we may scrutinize and detect the delightful fallacy. So little harmful are the labours of the metaphysician.

But the objection I have been considering, assumes another form. Not only does the analysis of the moral sentiment tend, it is said, to its disparagement, but the opposite doctrine of a high, absolute, unquestionable sentiment of morality, gives a positive support and energy to human character. Now, if there be any one who has built his morality on this metaphysical basis of an imperative sense of duty, whose authority disdains all argument, and admits of no appeal, so that the withdrawal of this creed would shake his peace and self-confidence, let him by all means retain his philosophical faith. Let him throw this theory and these pages aside. Indeed, it is quite superfluous in me to give him this last license. If he has condescended to cast an eye upon these pages, I know well with what consummate contempt he has

turned them over, pronouncing them, without the least hesitation, to be barren, jejune, and utterly destitute of all profundity whatever.

To expect one tone of moral feeling from all mankind, what is it but to expect one mode of happiness, one temper of mind, one fortune, and one taste, to all the race of man? He who after familiarizing himself with the stern morality of the Stoic school, turns his observation upon some domestic scene of civilized life, and on the manners of amiable and enlightened men, feels that the rigid fortitude, and ardour of endurance, which he has been contemplating, have here no place, no meaning, no purpose. A moral force of far more temperate and bland description is quite sufficient for scenes, and for men, like these. Nay, if he looks at society in some aspects, he may be surprised to find how great a part of the business of life is transacted without the direct observable interference of a moral control—which seems rather to have prescribed to men at once their career, than to accompany them at each step of their progress. Men labour at their several callings—all the world is abroad from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof,—in full activity, need and ambition constraining and impelling them,—and only now and then, when a shock is given to the usual tenour of existence, do they raise serious question as to what the conscience will or will not permit. Habit does all, and seems everywhere to ordain and to disallow. But if the same observer carries still further his examinations,

he will not fail to discover some positions in life where the sternest moral resolution, and a sort of desperation in virtue, are not more than enough to preserve the mind from dejection, from utter overthrow, and total alienation from existence. Such positions produce what they require. A moral sentiment strongly excited, and put to constant and severe task-work, becomes separated in the mind of its possessor from all that the world is accustomed to call happiness. The end of virtue is lost sight of in the efforts of virtue. It becomes its own end and purpose:—a virtue militant, contending for a cause apparently quite distinct from the hopeless and abandoned one of human felicity.

I respect, I revere, the high tone of moral feeling which conducts to this state of opinion. Next to the cheerful calm of prosperous hours, what more valued boon can Providence bestow than this stubborn independent philosophy, so fitted to adverse and distressful seasons? The afflicted spirit assumes a greatness which almost puts to shame the gay and the fortunate. The form of the moral hero is seen to dilate as the gloom falls around it. I respect, I say, this noble consolation which the virtuous man, beset by calamity, finds in the simple exaggerated claim of virtue—I leave him in undisturbed and imperturbable possession of a philosophic faith which imparts new energies to a mind else drooping and self-deserted—but I cannot consent to impose on all mankind a sentiment so exclusively appropriate to the

position and temper of a few—I cannot repeat as dogmatic truth for the reception of all the world, what the mind gives forth as truth for itself under peculiar circumstances, and in the hour of its need and tribulation. If the heart of man, some gayer moralist might say, is to be thus consulted as an oracle of truth, why should we prefer its sadder to its more cheerful responses? Why should we consult the oracle when invested in clouds and darkness, and not trust as well to what it utters when light is breaking upon all things, and it gives its answer in music to the morning beam? The mind at ease says nothing of the vanity of all things—never decries the pursuit of reasonable pleasure—never divorces the claims of virtue from the cause of happiness.

I might now, forsaking the defensive attitude I have hitherto assumed, insist on the positive advantages to be derived from teaching the doctrine of ethics, of which an exposition is here offered. The view here presented, for instance, of the *origin* of the moral sentiment, will surely enforce on all reflective persons the especial duty of forming and dispensing correct judgments on the conduct of their fellow-citizens—since thus alone can a strong and pure morality, in which all have so vital an interest, be ultimately produced. Next to acting well ourselves, is the duty of judging honestly and wisely of the actions of others. But I pass the topic by because I am quite satisfied that, whatever doctrine may find

favour in the schools, and in chairs of philosophy, men do in reality act upon the full persuasion of the intimate connection that exists between the utterance of opinion and the moral force generated in society. They never fail to visit upon each other as a distinct substantive delinquency, the promulgation of immoral sentiments.

I have no new mode to proclaim of teaching morality; if I had I might be sure I had been theorizing falsely. Neither let me add, is it any part of the object of this essay to speculate on what a merely moral, or social teaching might effect; or to place in opposition, for a moment, a religious with a civic education. Doubtless we stand in need of every motive—of every source—of good conduct. I have been desirous only—confining myself to the strict business of *theorizing*, that is, of *describing*,—to state with accuracy the nature of the moral sentiment.

CHAPTER VI.

Objections of a Theological Cast.—Some Remarks on Natural Religion.

THERE remains to be disposed of another class of objections to our theory; objections, however, more formidable from the solemnity of the subject they are connected with, than from their intrinsic validity. Inferences are charged upon it prejudicial to the doctrines of natural theology; or rather certain inferences deducible, it is supposed, from an opposite theory, and highly favourable to natural religion, are said to be lost to us in this system of ethics. A few words will suffice to show that nothing is really gained to the cause of religion by the doctrine of an intuitive sentiment of morals, and therefore nothing can be lost by the abandonment of that doctrine.

Some have taught, or by their language have implied, that from the consciousness of such a sentiment they could derive a direct argument for the *existence* of God; they inferred the being of a Judge from the feeling within of a judgment passed, or to be passed. But it is hardly necessary to remark, that we must already have the notion of God before we can connect with Him our sentiment of duty. If there be a feeling as of a judgment of some superior, we cannot

pronounce it to be that of God, while as yet His existence is unknown. A sentiment manifestly intended for our guidance in life, may, indeed, as an instance of adaptation, aid in the great argument from design, and thus assist in establishing the existence of God; but it can do so in no other manner; and it is plain that whatever psychological account we adopt of this part of our mental constitution, such a mode of argument is equally cogent.

But the greater number of reasoners content themselves with deriving from this moral intuition a proof of the *moral government* of God—an evidence of the rule according to which we are to be judged by the Supreme Power. We recognise, say they, as a distinct independent state of mind, a sentiment of obligation, not referable to man—which when the being of God is revealed to us through other sources of knowledge, is directly referred to Him as to its relative object. Thus we have an immediate transition from morality into religion; and the moral government of God becomes almost an intuitive truth. I have endeavoured to present this statement with as much clearness as it is capable of, yet it manifestly involves a strange confusion of ideas. A sentiment of duty, or obedience, exists in the mind of man—the being of God is revealed—and then the sentiment at once refers itself to that being as the Power to whom obedience was due. Here the natural order of things is boldly reversed, and we have a sentiment of obedience preceding a knowledge that a power existed to command, and, of course, that

that power had commanded. If it was the nature of this sentiment of obligation to exist without any known relative, why should the knowledge of God's existence so change that nature that it should require and receive a relative object? Surely the wisdom and universal, and therefore equal benevolence, of God, afford safer ground, than metaphysics such as these, for inferring His moral government.

Others, venturing on more hazardous speculations, have contended that this favoured theory alone enables them to assign a *moral character* to the Deity; which they assert cannot be done in consistency with our system of ethics. A sentiment, say they, which is but the product of the restraints of society, cannot be attributed to the sole and omnipotent God who knows no superior; but if the sentiment result from, or, in more accurate language, be synonymous with a perception of an eternal distinction in things themselves—of an immutable right and wrong—then we can with perfect propriety attribute a moral character to God himself. In the first place, this representation assumes that our moral perception, because direct and immediate in us, must be equally so in all other intelligent beings; that is, in other words, must be the perception of an essential objective truth. But what on this head I would more particularly draw attention to is this: if the sentiment of right and wrong be of that single abstract character that, like the feeling of belief attendant upon a mathematical truth, it may exist in a solitary intelligence—if it no longer imply

in itself an acknowledgment of some superior power, and *therefore* may be attributed to the sole and supreme Deity—then the whole view of the moral nature of man is altered. The sense of obligation—the perception of this that it is *right*, of that that it is *wrong*—no longer in *him* refers to a superior; the sentiment of duty and obedience must mean (if this *be* a meaning) a duty and obedience to himself, beginning and ending with his own individual nature. There is, in fact, no such thing as *obligation* in morals. This mode of reasoning is quite incompatible, be it also observed, with that argument just now considered, by which the *moral government* of God was deduced from the responsibility of man; for it is plain that the sentiment expressed in the terms *right* and *wrong*, cannot both prove the moral government of God, because of its implied reference to a superior, and yet be applicable, as an attribute, to the character of God expressly, because it implies no such superior. In short, these reasoners, in order somewhat presumptuously to adapt our moral sentiments to the Deity, utterly destroy them for the purposes of man, and even for the purposes of religion.

All those inferences in favour of religion which are drawn from the existing state of moral feelings amongst mankind, are, of course, equally valid, whatever metaphysical theory we adopt as to the origin of those feelings. The imperfect gratification of our moral sentiments—the unsatisfied love of justice—the consequent expectation both for ourselves and others of a future state of reward and punish-

ment—such arguments as these, which have at all times constituted the better part of the natural religion of mankind, have the same force and efficacy, be that what it may, under either system of ethics. But we cannot succeed by any subtle process of thought, in assigning at once to our moral feelings a religious character—so that in the very fact of a moral feeling shall be implied a religious obligation.

No advantage, therefore, is gained to the cause of natural theology, nor is the transition from morality to religion in the least facilitated, by this doctrine of an intuitive sentiment. Indeed the more this ethical guide is approximated to the nature of an instinct, the more are we induced by this analogy to infer that it is peculiar to the human species, and adapted solely to the purposes of life.

If the difficulties are urged which arise in the attempt, according to any theory, and by a course of merely human argument, to establish the moral government of God, I have but this brief answer to make, that he who holds the ethical doctrine here advocated is not bound more than any other person to prove that from the book of human reason which is written down for us in the book of Revelation. From the condition of our moral nature we may draw certain presumptions in favour of this great tenet, but on these we are not compelled to rely. Religion with us has its distinct and proper source: we have Heaven's own word for what we believe of Heaven. The Christian is not a religious man because he is a moral being, but he practises morality from motives

which no system of ethics can supply. He assumes the moral duties of life in quite a new character; he adopts them, as the civilian might say, *per universitatem juris*: the moral man is dead or superseded, the religious man survives to support, with better strength and understanding, his rights and duties.

If we care to examine what the strength, or weakness, of the human mind has effected, or is able now of itself to effect, in the discovery of religious truth, we must, of necessity, descend, for a time, into a region of obscurity—of fiction or conjecture; but our hearts may be perfectly at ease in this valley of shadows: we can ascend, at a word, from its toilsome obscurity to the safe and illumined eminence on which Christianity has placed us. We shall, at all events, perceive, in our dark sojourn, enough of truth to form a basis for belief in Revelation, and shall assuredly encounter enough of doubt and hesitation to demonstrate our extreme need of it. What more does the Christian want? What more could the Christian rationally expect? I cannot, for my own part, understand that jealous anxiety to uphold and exaggerate whatever human reason alone can establish of religious creed, which is sometimes manifested by men who believe that the knowledge of God has been retained on the earth by sacred tradition, by prophet, and by miracle, and that the complete history of the relation that subsists between their Creator and the human race, has been expressly promulgated in the Christian Revelation.

However strong and prevalent the presumption of

a *moral government* of God, this, I confess, is not apparently the first idea which occurs to the human mind on the subject of theology, nor is it perhaps the last which, if thrown back upon its own resources, it would retain. Natural religion seems to rise to this idea, and then, if not stayed by a stronger hand, if left to go alone, to sink and decline from it. It rose to the doctrine through aid of premises supplied by the boldness of desire and the ductility of imagination; and happily before those premises were withdrawn, the belief became a truth authentically revealed. Whenever we trace a sacred faith to its source in the unaided faculties of man, we trace it, not to the unsatisfied demands of moral feeling, but to the uncertainty of human fortunes. The events of life depending on circumstances beyond the control of men—the success of the chase, of the war, even the profits of husbandry being precarious—an idea springs up in minds which have taken no very severe distinction between fact and imagination, that a power of benevolent or malicious intention sits watchful to promote or to frustrate their endeavours. It is not till this idea has run a wild and extravagant career that the supernatural power, thus introduced, becomes transformed into a moral judge, dispensing favour in this world, or the next, solely according to the merits of virtue. And even when this great result has been effected, it will be found that the reason of man continues to be indebted to those bold conjectures of the imagination, which at once, and

without forethought, established that *personal* relationship between the individual man and a divine power, which it was found so much more easy to modify and to characterize, than it would have been in the first instance to make good by argument.

We look on a gross anthropomorphism as an error of the rudest times; yet there seems to have been a condition of the mind below even this, and where the object of worship could not so much as boast similitude to a human being. The barbarian has looked upon a stone, an uncouth figure representing nothing, a misshapen block, as the source from which his good and ill fortune were to be derived. Religion, at this stage, appears little more than a strange blunder in physics. But the analogy between a human being and the supernatural power, whose interference was sought or deprecated, could not be long absent. The idol assumed more decidedly and uniformly the figure of man. Amidst propitiatory gifts, and sacrifices, and absurd ceremonies, the idea grew—promoted by the fears of the criminal, and the expectations of virtue, and the general love of justice, and the policy of states, and the reason, and interest of all men—that *moral conduct* was the surest means of obtaining the favour of these supernatural rulers of human destiny, to whom was committed, in an especial manner, the care of unrewarded goodness, and unpunished crime. Meanwhile poets liberated the god from its stationary wood or stone, and refashioning its limbs, peopled the air and the earth

with divinities. Philosophers either added to the confusion, as in Egypt, by putting forth dark enigmas of their own under the forms of popular idolatry; or else rising, as in Greece, entirely above the superstition of their countrymen, smiled at the populace of gods, and taught whatever reason could prove, or could admit, of the Divine nature. Their disciples were few; their faith was construed an infidelity.

Such, in brief, was the progress of natural religion, in countries not favoured by divine instruction, up to the appearance of Christianity. If now we would recur to the subject, we must resume it where the Greek and Roman philosopher left off; for that is now the natural religion of the foremost nations of the world, which was previously the teaching of its best thinkers. Underneath the predominance of a divine revelation there has taken place a revolution in the state of human knowledge, and consequently of popular theology. That rude state of science so propitious to the imagination has been supplanted by scientific knowledge and habits of thinking altogether as hostile to it. A new nature—a new physical world—has called for a new religion.

If the pagan theology had not retired before the irresistible power of Christianity,—which it did, however, slowly and with manifest reluctance, and after having existed for a time, in its spirit at least, under new forms assumed from the new religion,—it must have surrendered, with all its gods and

goddesses, at the approach of modern science. Astronomy alone would have sufficed for its overthrow. The material universe it discloses requires other and greater gods; and a race of divinities who sojourned on this earth, who haunted its shady recesses, and tenanted its lofty mountains, must have ceased to be the objects of worship when surrounded by that enlarged and magnificent scene of creation which is now familiar to the minds, almost to the senses, of all men. The gods of paganism could not have occupied this new creation; there is no place for them in the universe according to Newton.

It is worth while to observe that science, by transforming the very habitation in which we dwell, has rendered impossible that play of fancy, that anthropomorphism, which in the old world was so predominant. What we have of this kind is traditional, not native to our times. To us in whom the first deceptive impression of the senses has been corrected almost as soon as we could think by knowledge it cost ages to acquire, and other ages to extend and circulate—to us it is a curious and distinct effort of the imagination to conceive what manner of world this was to its earlier inhabitants. They lived, at least the multitude, and the multitude are in this matter everything, in a very streightened, circumscribed creation,—a flat and stationary earth, arched over by the sky as by its natural roof. In this miniature of nature the human form was great. A god was invested in it without thought of violation

to his dignity, and men assigned him for habitation a region just beyond the clouds, or else the waste and inaccessible places of their own world, the air, and the ocean, and tops of mountains, and caverns in the rock. The humanized divinity had a fit location, and could be supported in the imagination without much incongruity. But what if such forms had continued to exist till science had worked her great transformation? When astronomy had dislodged the rounded world from its rest at the centre of all things, and sent it to revolve on its wide circuit one only of a multitude of similar and far-scattered globes—when that arch which so securely overbuilt it had expanded into a limitless vacancy and left the earth diminished, and alone, and far from the gates of Heaven—what place, what function, would have remained to the astonished gods of Olympus? Had they survived till our day of science, they must then have vanished like a dream. The popular imagination is gone for ever that conducted the chariot-wheel of god or goddess over the blue firmament—there is no road for the horses of the sun—earth and Heaven are no longer neighbour territories,—and the clouds in our atmosphere can never again give support to etherial messenger journeying to and from the celestial confines. The world is disenchanted for the abode of these fairy gods—the high mountain has sunk from its imposing, because heaven-reaching, altitude—the throne of Jupiter is reversed for ever!

We are scandalized as we read of the apotheosis of the deceased emperors of Rome, and of the still more monstrous worship of the living Cæsar. But what were the *dii majores* themselves, Mars or Apollo, that they should disdain to share their adoration with the sovereigns of the Roman world? What was an ordinary heathen god, often relegated to a single island,—to whom the care of a city or province was thought sufficient for occupation or dignity,—when compared with him whose invincible legions might at the same time have been combating in the wilds of Caledonia, and on the banks of the Tigris? I question whether there were materials in the popular imagination out of which to construct for itself a conception greatly surpassing the power and glory of him who swayed the Roman Empire. But the vast ideas which now prevail in all minds of the material creation give birth in all minds to ideas equally vast and magnificent of a divine Power. A Power whose existence is manifested by its agency throughout the whole frame of the universe, and whose greatness ever expands with our expanding knowledge of that universe, throws every human title, and every pretension and attribute of humanity into utter insignificance; and we may feel satisfied that while the elements of science remain to us, and continue to be extensively diffused, mankind will never relapse into the worship of any other than that Being who unites all we can conceive of omnipotence and wisdom.

So far the boast of science is complete ; so far the natural theology of our days is grand and elevating. But let it be observed with that candour which no one who meddles with philosophy ought to forsake, that the same science which by its results presents so magnificent a demonstration of the existence of God, is, by the habits of thinking to which it is bound, quite inadequate so to *characterize* that Being as to present to us an object within the reach and scope of human worship. It surrounds us on every side with *laws*—laws of society and of man, as well as of the material creation. Science fills all nature with the spirit of God, but denies to us any other exponent of Him than is found in the same nature. It presents us a Deity operating to one great entire scheme, and its own teaching would incline us to believe that His government of men, like His government of all the world beside, is carried on, not by such legislation as a human judge administers, but by laws which execute themselves, and admit not of infraction or disobedience. It presents us—not with that moral governor who, when the busy and perplexed scene of life is closed, reverses, or supplies, or repeats the decisions of each human tribunal—but with that Power which has instituted all human tribunals, whether of opinion or of judicature, and governs in and through them. That moral government, the idea of which it was the pride of reason to have established, and which we now live under as by express Charter from Heaven, becomes in our natural

theology obscure and dubious, and is in danger of being resolved into the laws of our social existence, as the natural government of God is already identified with those of the material world. Thus the form of Deity which our scientific habits would alone instruct us to contemplate, affects the mind with no other than that sentiment of wonder which reflection on the stupendous creation itself is calculated to produce. Nay, there is no form of Deity given : creation becomes more and more distinctly one great manifestation of thought, but the thinking creative power is more and more removed from our conception. As little can we shape it forth, of our own authority, in the qualities of a human mind, as in the lineaments of a human body. Scarce can we say whether it be one or many ; for the unity of design exhibited in the creation proves, in strictness, a unity of counsel and of purpose, not a singleness of person or being.—But to us, fortunately, it is another than the God of science who sits upon that throne which science is permitted only to erect !

To decide what course the general mind would take if it were no longer secured in its present position by the help of distinct revelation, were no easy, and no grateful task. Perhaps other and older modes of reasoning might be found sufficiently strong to counteract this habit of *legalizing* all things. If without irreverence we might venture to suppose the withdrawal from the world, for a season, of the Christian doctrine, though we should lose indeed the

incalculable benefit of a faith the sole medium of salvation, and therefore, as regards our eternal interest, be utterly bankrupt and ruined; yet so far as piety is a sentiment controlling the heart and elevating the character of man, we might not, perhaps, be left in so destitute and deplorable a condition as those who love religion are apt to fear, and those few who are its enemies are accustomed without any pain to anticipate. There are certain presumptions of a religious character, already hinted at, and indeed familiar to all minds, which so readily occur to human thought, and these there are so many passions, so many interests, so many reasons, for keeping alive in ourselves, and upholding in the belief of others, that they might be almost as generally received, or at least professed, as Christianity at the present day. The same feelings which perform no ineffectual part in upholding the authority of that, as of every religion—the same disquietude of heart—the same aspirations after a happier existence—the same desire to believe in another region, though it be fruitful only of present hopes, or even of present fears, and afford but an object of new solicitude and endeavour—the same sense of public policy, whether made effective by permanent institutions, or that perpetual and all-pervading force of general opinion that surrounds us like another atmosphere—all these would be equally engaged in support of the imperfect tenets and more scanty creed of natural theology. The old heart of humanity might be too

strong for all the fetters which science would impose. Diversities of doctrine, doubt and unbelief would certainly exist—it might be said they exist now and always have existed—but not possibly in such proportions as to overbear the general efficacy of religious faith. Whilst that class of speculative minds who now seem ranged on the side of cavil and denial, because under a system established without their aid, they have no recognized task assigned to them but that of checking the tendency to superstitious observances, or the still more invidious office of detecting the errors of an ardent and superabounding faith, might be, for the most part, occupied in the more natural and agreeable effort of endeavouring to establish some direct and positive truth. If the care were left to philosophy of making provision for our religious sentiments, it would be more her pride to construct than destroy. Nay, who can tell but that even that poetic imagination which delights especially in gathering up the fragments of the broken idol, of placing it again in the temple, and bending before it in mimic adoration—who can tell that even this lighter spirit of thought might not, under such circumstances, work to more serious purpose than it designed, and, having re-modified which it re-constructed, leave behind it, for the worship of living men, an edifice reared in sportive strength, and simply for its own free and wandering devotion?

There would remain at least one source of a pro-

found, anti-terrestrial sentiment, which can never be closed to the reflective mind, and which no scientific knowledge can affect. There is a mystery within and around us. Let science complete her task, and accomplish all which the most enlarged and accurate minds can assign for her province, there is still a region of thought,—if thought it can be called where only question is heard, and no response, and the question itself is scarce intelligible—into which she can make no incursions. The philosophy of Newton and La Place—the experimental knowledge of all Europe—has not encroached one inch upon this territory. It is the same now as to Chaldean shepherds. Where are we? Whence this whole of things? Whither? Wherefore? These are the same unanswerable questions as when they first were asked, and the unbroken silence which is their sole return makes the same deep impression on the human heart. Render the whole world clear and transparent to scientific vision—turn it before us, as it were, in the sun—make us familiar with all its movements, intricate and incessant, so that we trace the precise succession of all events throughout the complicated maze—it matters not—the whole scene,—the whole circle of interwoven incident,—floats on over an abyss of unfathomable mystery.

I am not speaking here of what is generally understood by the thirst of knowledge, the desire to comprehend all the phenomena of creation. This is a desire having its manifest end and purpose in the

practical career of existence. Neither do I claim for the human mind a right, in some future state, to have all things laid open before it. I cannot, indeed, conceive how thought could be born or nourished in a created intellect, before which all things should lie thus open and exposed. A mind is made by learning. Such an intellect would put forth a still stationary gaze, rather than any process of thought: the knowing all things would resemble the knowing nothing. It is not to understand all phenomena that gives the unappeasable restlessness to human reason, of which I am speaking—but to know that which supports all phenomena—what truth there is, and whether there be a truth *behind them*.

This mysterious questioning the man of science is apt impatiently to despise. It is not that hopeful curiosity which leads him on from day to day to fresh accessions of knowledge; it is not busied with the *as yet unknown* but with the *unknowable*. But although this is not that useful sentiment which animates the scientific inquirer—although it is felt by those who entertain it often, to be rather an oppression than an impulse to the mind—yet it cannot possibly be banished: it has its fixed place in human thought, and has retained its station in the meditative character throughout all ages.

To the reflective mind this dim outlying space of the unknown and impenetrable has a strange and powerful fascination. That which to all mankind is the last boundless distance suffusing a scarcely

recognised charm over the near landscape of life, he fixes on with strained effort of vision. There where the line is drawn, as well to human passion, as to human knowledge, his gaze is arrested; he would pierce through the sphere of endless change into the still eternity beyond; he has no optics for such a purpose,—he has no power to withdraw. From such a mind you may take temple and altar, miracle and prophet, you cannot take religion; you may obscure the form of Deity—painfully dark it may grow before him—you will not abstract all sentiment of piety: he bows before the veiled divinity—he still adores an unknown God!

But happily for mankind, the conjecture as to what form natural religion might of itself assume, is for all practical purposes as useless and unnecessary as it is to the speculative inquirer dark and intricate. Having brought the limited subject of this essay to a close, I here willingly terminate this brief performance. If the reader in his study of practical ethics in the works of Paley and others, should find himself somewhat less embarrassed than before by subtle questions relative to the nature of the moral sentiment, it has answered the utmost and sole end at which it aspired.

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